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THE KNIFE THROWERS

By FREDERIC VAN RENSSELAER DEY,
Author of "Not Like Other Men," Etc.

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CHAPTER XII.

RODRIGUEZ'S CONFESSION.

FOR a moment the three Mexicans were too greatly astounded to move or to speak, and that moment was sufficient to give the officers a chance to seize them.

Escudera wheeled like lightning, but, observing instantly that there was no chance to escape and doubtless realizing the futility of such a thing even if he could effect it, remained motionless where he stood while the officer nearest him snapped a pair of handcuffs on his wrist.

Rodriguez made one heroic dash toward the door, but ran straight into the embrace of the officer nearest him and was also handcuffed.

Bustamente acted as his half developed nature had taught him to act in emergencies. He whipped out a knife and struck with all his strength straight for the heart of the man who charged upon him. The weapon would have taken effect and there would have been a second murder chargeable against the trio but for the presence of Craig Wyndham.

He appeared from behind the screen where he had been concealed just in time to see the weapon raised, and he sprang toward the maddened man and seized his wrist. He was only partly

He whippea out a knife and struck with all his strength straight for the heart.

successful, however. He diverted the blow so that it cut through the officer's sleeve and inflicted an ugly gash on the fleshy part of his arm.

Through it all the district attorney remained unmoved in his chair. Indeed there was scarcely time for him to do aught else, for the whole scene did not occupy more than half a dozen seconds. After that there was a picture which would have made excellent material for a tableau—the three men handcuffed, one calm and smiling cynically, another pale with fright and the third furious with baffled rage, the officers beside them, with firm hands upon their shoulders; on the other side of the table the district attorney, still seated in his armchair and looking ineffably bored, and beside him, with one hand on the back of his chair, the tall, athletic figure of Craig Wyndham, looking like the god of Vengeance satisfied.

Escudera was the first to break the silence that followed the short struggle.

"I suppose, Mr. Craig Wyndham, I owe this to you," he said.

"I think you owe it to yourself and your own treachery," replied Wyndham calmly.

"Do you believe that you can fasten your crime upon me?" continued the Mexican. But the district attorney interrupted before Wyndham could respond.

"Take those two men from the room," he commanded sternly. "Officer Dunn, remain here with your prisoner, Rodriguez. We have not done with him yet."

"Juan"— began Escudera, but again he was interrupted, this time by the officer who had him in charge, who clapped one hand rudely over his mouth and led him out of the room.

"Rodriguez," said the district attorney softly when the others had gone, "I do not believe that you are as bad as the others, and for that reason I have kept you here to talk with you alone."

The stenographer seized his pen again and resumed work.

"Do you know," continued the official, "that there has not been a moment since Pendleton was murdered when you and your friends have not been shadowed by the police? We have not had you arrested simply because we were waiting for additional proof. And where do you suppose we expected to get that? I will tell you because you could not guess—from Mexico."

"From Mexico!" exclaimed Rodriguez involuntarily. The craftiness of the district attorney was too much for him.

"Yes, from Mexico," continued the official, inventing as he went along from the tale that Wyndham had told him. "We know, for example, that there was a conspiracy hatched between four of you and that Captain Ignacio Romero, now lying wounded in the City of Mexico, is the chief conspirator. We know that Escudera, Bustamente and you came here for the avowed purpose to assassinate Burr Pendleton. We know it because Romero has confessed."

Rodriguez started back and uttered a Spanish oath that is untranslatable. Then, whiter than before, he fixed his eyes again upon the district attorney, who after a moment's pause continued:

"It is more than likely, Rodriguez, that you will all go to the electric chair. Escudera and Bustamente certainly will, but you may possibly escape it."

"How?" gasped the man, now thoroughly frightened.

"By confessing freely everything you know concerning this matter. By doing that you will save us time, expense and trouble, and in return for that I can promise you that the judge will be lenient. You will not be executed. You may get off with a short term in prison. Think it over and answer me, for this is the last opportunity you will have."

"I am willing to tell all I know, sir. My life is worth more to me than their friendship."

"I thought so."

"Escudera killed Pendleton."

"Oh, I know that already! Tell me something I don't know."

"He can throw a knife straighter than you can shoot a pistol ball. He stood in the bedroom doorway and threw a knife into Pendleton's heart."

"I know that too. Tell me something I don't know."

"I followed him and Pendleton when they left the club that night. I crept up the stairs after them. I was even in the outer room where I could see Escudera throw the weapon when he did it, and I did see him."

"That is better. I know that also, to be sure, but I did not know all of it. Go on."

"I was obeying Escudera's orders. He was afraid that we might have to do for the old servant as well, and he thought it might take two of us. It was necessary that Pendleton should be put out of the way at once. I don't know why. It was something about some property."

"Yes; go on."

"Escudera told me to follow them and go up the stairs. The minute he was alone he was to open the door so that I could enter the room and secrete myself until the right moment. He had, while Pendleton was in Mexico, asked him to take charge of some papers for him which he pretended were of great value. He asked Pendleton for those papers that night. That was how he got him out of the room long enough to let me in. I hid behind the curtains at one of the windows. We did not much fear discovery, for if we had been discovered the old servant would have been killed also—that is, if my courage had held out, but I don't think it would."

"Nor I. Go on."

"Pendleton said he was tired and proposed taking a rest because he expected to be up late that night to transact some business with Mr. Wyndham, who was to go to him there."

"I understand. Well?"

"Escudera got his papers and pretended to go, but he waited in the hallway. Presently Pendleton went into the bedroom, closing the door after him. Then old James came in and went out once or twice. The last time he went out through the main entrance. He had his hat on, and I knew the coast was clear. I opened the door into the hall, and Escudera came into the room. He ordered me to do the knife throwing, but I refused. Then he went to the bedroom door and opened it softly. Pendleton was already asleep in his chair and did not hear him. It would not have made any difference if he had, for he would have been killed anyway. Escudera motioned to me and pointed into the room. I looked in and saw Pendleton asleep; then I stepped back. Escudera stood on the threshold in the doorway and threw the knife from there; then he reached in, seized the knob of the door and closed it. I asked him why he did not go in and get his knife, and he told me to mind my own business. We went out then, I last, and I left the door on the latch so that those who found the body might suspect that anybody might have entered from the street. That is all I know about the killing, sir."

"It seems to be quite enough. Where was Bustamente all this time?"

"He was watching Mr. Wyndham. He followed him to the house. Escudera and I waited with Bustamente on the other side of the street while Mr. Wyndham went in, for we expected that there would be an uproar at once. To our surprise, there was not. After awhile James came out, and the rest is practically as you have already heard me tell, except about the faked friend of Bustamente."

"Well, and after that?"

"Escudera went to the club to be there ahead of Wyndham, but he got there about the same moment. Bustamente and I got a drink and went down town."

"Now, Rodriguez, I will have your statement drawn off, and you will swear to it, I suppose?"

"Certainly."

"Officer, take him into the little room. Remain there until I am ready for you."

"Craig," said the district attorney when they were alone, "I have a suspicion that this is the best day's work

You will swear to it, I suppose?"

you ever did in your life. Do you know if that scoundrel Escudera had got here first with his yarn it would have bothered me, and I shouldn't wonder if I had issued a warrant for you. As it was, his story corroborated everything you had said, only it turned the tables on himself. It's a great piece of work for the district attorney,s office to accomplish, eh? I think it deserves a small bottle. Let's go and have one."

* * * * * * *

That evening, at the Savoy, Craig related to Carmen every event of the day and they were exceedingly happy, knowing that justice had placed its iron hands upon the murderers of Burr Pendleton.

A week later Carmen received a telegram from Mexico informing her that Ignacio Romero was dead, and subsequently a letter came explaining that he had committed suicide. He had made some trivial excuse to borrow a penknife from one of the nurses and with it had taken his own worthless life. Under his pillow was found a letter from New York, which told of the arrest and undoubted conviction of his friends. Doubtless that was his reason for the act.

A month later than that, while Craig and Carmen were sitting at the same table where they had their first luncheon together, he said to her:

"Carmelita, you know I told you once that I was a sudden fellow, but I do not think I have been very sudden in this affair of ours. One week from tomorrow I must sail for Europe on important business which cannot be postponed. Will you marry me one week from tomorrow and go with me?"

Her answer was "Yes."

THE END.

THE ANTARCTIC NIGHT.

It Is Far More Trying Than the Arctic Darkness.

From this day (May 17) we were not to see the sun again for two months. At the beginning we did not dread the prospect of this long polar night before us, but before the sun had been gone many days one of us became very ill. Danco lacked the constitution to hold out, and on June 5 he died. It is useless to dwell on sad recollections. He was loved on board the Belgica, and this loss, following on the death of the sailor Wiencke, who was washed overboard by a wave in Bransfield strait, made a deep impression on us. In the obscurity of the midday twilight we carried Danco's body to a hole which had been cut in the ice and committed it to the deep. A bitter wind was blowing as with bared heads, each of us silent and sad, we left him there—and the floe drifted on.

In the antarctic regions, thanks doubtless to the detestable climate, the disastrous effects of the polar night are far more marked than in the north. There is a general lowering of the system, and the heart acts feebly. Several of us developed serious symptoms, and without daily care on the part of the doctor others would not have survived the period of darkness, though it was relatively short. One part of Cook's treatment was very effective and ingenious. Those who were most affected by deficient circulation were made to stand in a half naked condition close to the redhot stove for several hours daily. In this way the action of the solar radiation was in part replaced by rays of artificial heat in a manner admittedly primitive, but none the less beneficial.

Life on board during the polar night was of great interest from a psychological point of view. One finds oneself in conditions of existence altogether abnormal and crowded against one's fellows in an uncomfortably narrow space. Some became nervous, excitable and sleepless, with the imagination continually wandering and dreaming. I was one of these. Others, more happily constituted, became chronically tired and indifferent. These slept much. But everybody was content to spend twelve hours a day or more in bed. One of the crew developed maniacal tendencies; another, in more evil case, was brought home insane.—Henryk Arctowsky in Geographical Journal.

New Year's In China.

In China it is considered obligatory on all persons to settle every pecuniary obligation before the first day of the new year, a custom that might with profit be imitated elsewhere. The Chinese have also the singular practice of dating all births on the first day of the year on which they occur, so that as far as the record shows every Chinaman has but one birthday, the first day of January. The widest variance is observable in the selection of the day which should be considered the first of the year. Some nations have begun it in the spring, others in the autumn, some in midsummer, most in midwinter; but, whatever the day, the usages and rejoicings which characterized it have not varied so greatly as might be supposed, but have remained for ages almost unchanged.

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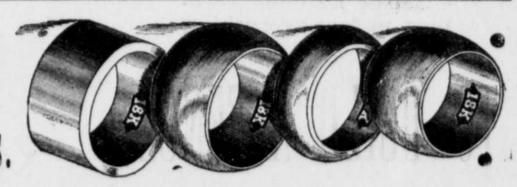

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